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*Vocalic r, l, m, n in Semitic.*—By FRANK R. BLAKE,  
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IN Indo-European philology vocalic *r, l, m, n* are equally as important as those sounds which are usually designated as the vowels *par excellence*. They seem to have been among the sounds possessed by the original common Indo-European speech, and many phenomena can be explained only by referring to them. For example the varying forms of the word for "wolf," Sanskrit *vrkas*, Greek λύκος, Gothic *wulfs*, Lithuanian *vilkas*, Old Bulgarian *vlūkŭ*, or again of the word for "hundred," Sanskrit *śatam*, Greek (ἑ)κατον, Latin *centum*, Gothic *hund*, Lithuanian *szim̃tas*, are best explained by assuming that the original vowel of the first syllable was in the first case vocalic *l*, in the second, vocalic *n*.<sup>1</sup>

In the Semitic languages apparently no such important role is played by these sounds. It is usually supposed that they did not form a part of the sound material of the parent Semitic speech,<sup>2</sup> but there seems to be one form at least in which the positing of a vocalic liquid is possible.

In Hebrew, Biblical Aramaic, and Assyrian we find two negative adverbs whose chief component is the consonant *l*, viz., Hebrew לֹא, לוֹא; Biblical Aramaic לוֹא, לוֹא; Assyrian *lā*, *ul*. In the first two languages the form לוֹא, לוֹא is employed as the usual negative of declarative statements, and is regularly autotonic, while לוֹא is the negative of optative and subjunctive statements and is proclitic, as is indicated by the Maqqeph which joins it to the following word. In Assyrian *lā* is certainly the usual accented negative, while *ul* seems to be used, at least in many cases, in sentences in which some other element bears the chief stress, e. g., *edu ul êzib*, 'not one escaped', *nûru ul immarû* 'light they see not,' *ul zikaru šunu*, *ul sinnišāti*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Brugmann, *Grundriss d. Vergl. Gram. der Indogerm. Sprachen*, 2<sup>te</sup> Bearb. Strassburg, 1897, §§ 30, 77, 429—460, 497—532.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Haupt, *Über die beiden Halbvocale y und i*, BA. I., p. 294.

šunu 'they are neither male nor female.' In Ethiopic, the only other language in which 'al occurs, we find it only in the quasi-verb አልቦ፣ 'albô 'there is not, has not,' and in the negative አኩ፣ 'akkô, in both cases without accent. It seems therefore that these two series of forms may be ultimately of the same origin, lâ, lô being the representatives of the negative when accented, 'al, ul being the representatives, when proclitic. The latter forms may have been developed from the authotonic lâ as follows. With loss of accent the vowel â was shortened and finally disappeared, leaving only l, probably pronounced as l̥; this vocalic l developed a prothetic vowel which was pronounced with initial glottal catch; the a vowel of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Ethiopic 'al is due to the influence of this catch; in Assyrian the Aleph was probably lost, and then the form was written with u, the vowel that seemed to render the sound best.<sup>1</sup>

Altho liquid and nasal vowels play so unimportant a part in the parent Semitic speech, there are a number of cases in which they appear to have been developed in the individual languages. In many cases, however, in the forms in question the liquid and nasal vowels themselves do not appear, but must be assumed in the transition forms from which they are derived, e. g., Nestorian Syriac ܕܗܠܬܗ, dēhēlthā is developed from the original dīhlātā through the intermediate stages dīhl̥thā, dīhl̥thā.

In classical Arabic, Ethiopic, and Assyrian examples of these vowels are rare. The perfect of the VII form in Arabic seems to be a case in point, انقتل *inqatala* being derived from *nqatala*,<sup>2</sup> a form developed on the basis of the imperfect by dropping the performative *ia*, but the treatment of *ʔ* + consonant does not differ from that of any combination of two consonants at the beginning of a word, as for example in VIII form اقتتل *iqtatala*. The varying forms of the word for 'man' امرء *mar'u*, امرء *mir'u*, امرء *mur'u*, امرء *imra'u* may point to the presence of an *r*, the form being originally *my'u*.

In Ethiopic the prepositional forms አምነ፣ አም—*əmna*, *əm* are to be derived from the original *mina* (cf. Arab. مِنْ before the article) through an intermediate stage *ṃna*: *əm* is derived

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *ultu* below p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Haupt, *Nachträge und Berichtigungen*, BA. I p. 328.

from *ēmna* by dropping of the final syllable after the accent had shifted to the first.

In Assyrian the writing *er* in forms like *unammer* 'make shine,' *uma'er* 'send,' instead of the regular *ir* may represent the *r* vowel in the unaccented syllable.<sup>1</sup> It is not impossible also that the preposition *ultu* 'from' is derived from an originally unaccented or proclitic form of *īstu* or *iltu*, through the intermediate stage *l̥tu*. Notice that the vowel developed out of *l̥* is *u* in this case as in the negative *ul* above.

In Syriac the forms of this character are more numerous.<sup>2</sup> In the Eastern dialect words in which *r, l, m, n* followed by Shewa immediately precede the final syllable e. g., *dehletha* 'fear', syncopate the Shewa and develop a vowel before the consonant, e. g., *deheltha*. Between forms like *dehletha* and *deheltha* there must have been a series of intermediate forms like *dehl̥tha* with liquid or nasal vowel.

Words which begin with *r* followed by Shewa, e. g., *reqî'â* 'firmament,' often lose the Shewa and take a prothetic vowel instead written with *aleph*, e. g., *'arqî'â*; an intermediate stage *ʔqî'â* must also be assumed here.

After a word ending in a consonant the initial syllables *le, be, de* are often changed in poetry to *el, ev, ed*, e. g., *'ith elhôn*. In the case of *l* an intermediate stage *l̥* is to be assumed e. g., *'ith l̥hôn*; in the other cases the change is probably analogical.

In Hebrew, liquid and nasal vowels appear to occur in unaccented final syllables. These are found chiefly in the following classes of forms; viz.,

- a) Segholate nouns, e. g., סֵפֶר 'book,' רֶגֶל 'foot,' לֶחֶם 'bread,' שֶׁמֶן 'fat;'
- b) in Segholate verbal forms, e. g., נִגַּל, נִגְלָה, jussive Qal and Hiphil respectively of גִּלָּה 'reveal;'
- c) in forms of the imperfect with ו conversive which have recessive accent, e. g., וַיִּלָּחֶם 'and he fought.'

In the first two classes of forms the fact that the last syllable contains a liquid or nasal vowels and not short *e* followed by a consonant is indicated in the first place by the fact that such vowels are found in similar forms in other

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Delitzsch, *Assyr. Gram.*, Berlin, 1889, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Brockelmann, *Syrische Gram.*, Berlin, 1899, §§ 70—73.

languages, e. g., Eng. *taper, eagle, bosom, leaven*, the last syllables of which all contain liquid or nasal vowels in spite of the spelling: secondly by the fact that similar Hebrew forms ending in *u* or *i*, change these consonants to the vowels *û* or *î* e. g., בָּהוּ 'chaos' from *bûhu* or חָלִי 'sickness' (pausal form) from *hûlî*; so בֶּהֶן (i. e. *bôhên*) 'thumb' from *bûhn*. The fact that all other Segholate forms with the exception of those containing second or third guttural radicals are likewise spelt with Seghol in the last syllable does not militate against the assumption of liquid and nasal vowels in words ending in liquids or nasals. The Massorites, of course, knew nothing of such vowels and so spelt them, with the sign for an unaccented short vowel in a closed syllable + consonant, just as we do for example in English.

In the forms of the imperfect with ו conversive like וַיִּלָּחֶם 'and he fought,' we find of course plenty of forms that do not end in liquids or nasals also written with Seghol + consonant, e. g., וַיִּכְרַךְ, and the Seghol might in most of these cases be regarded simply as a modification of accented Qere in forms like וַיִּלָּחֶם, וַיִּכְרַךְ. The correspondence, however, of וַיֵּאמֶר with unaccented Seghol + *r* to יֵאמֶר with accented Pathah + *r*, where Seghol + *r* evidently indicate the *r* vowel, since Seghol is not the representative of unaccented Pathah, seems to indicate that we have liquid or nasal vowels also in the forms with original *i* in the final syllable.

In all these forms, then, the spelling Seghol + liquid or nasal seems to be used to indicate vocalic *r, l, m, n*. Whenever, therefore we find these combinations in an unaccented position, we are confronted with the possibility of liquid or nasal vowels. There are several series of forms besides those just discussed in which these vowels seem to be present.

In a number of nouns with prefixed מ made from stems with initial *r, l, m* we find the vowel of the prefix written Seghol, e. g.,

- מִרְכָּבָה 'chariot'
- מִרְחָב 'wide space'
- מִרְחָק 'distance'
- מִרְקָחִים 'aromatic plants'
- מִרְקָחָה 'salve'
- מִלְקָחִים 'pinchers'
- מִלְתָּחָה 'wardrobe'
- מִמְשָׁלָה 'ruling.'

Here the Seghol before ר might be explained as a partial assimilation of *i* to *r*, *r* being sometimes a guttural. But ר when it acts as a guttural regularly causes complete assimilation of the preceding vowel to *a* and not partial assimilation to Seghol; besides the forms with *l* and *m* remain unexplained. It is not improbable that in all these forms we have a vocalic liquid or nasal after the prefix מ indicated as we should expect by Seghol + consonant; thus, *mṣkēbāh*, *mṣqāḥaim*, *mṣšālāh*, &c. The form מְרִירָה 'thy rebelliousness,' from מֵרִי is probably to be explained in the same way.

The possessive suffixes of the second and third person plural כֶּם, כֶּן, הֶם, הֶן as well as the independent pronouns of the second person plural אַתֶּם, אַתֶּן, all have Seghol in the last syllable followed by *m* or *n*. This Seghol is said to be derived from an *i* which belonged originally only in the feminine, e.g., Assy. *šina* 'they,' but which has been extended by analogy to the masculine forms which originally had *u*, e. g., Assy. *šunu* Arab. *hum* 'they,' Assy. *attunu*, Arab. *antum* 'ye.'<sup>1</sup> The presence of Seghol in these syllables instead of the regular Qere is explained by Brockelmann as due to the fact that they were originally unaccented, and that the original vocalization is preserved even after the shift of the accent to the last syllable.<sup>2</sup> Such a levelling of the *i* vowel of the feminine has certainly taken place in the independent pronoun of the third person masculine הֵם, הֵיָה 'they,' and it may have taken place in all the masculine forms above mentioned, but it is unnecessary to assume such a process. If, as we have supposed, the final syllable was originally unaccented, we may have here simply nasal vowels, in the masculine representing a reduced form of *um*, in the feminine, of *in*.

This conception of these endings also offers a better explanation of the third person plural suffixes *ām*, *ān* as in מוֹסֶם, מוֹסֶן 'their horses.' It is difficult to see how they could be contracted from *\*ahim* or *\*ahum* and *\*ahin*. These would naturally yield the diphthongal forms *\*aim*, *\*aum*, *\*ain* or contracted *\*ēm*, *\*ōm*, *\*ēn*. If, however, we suppose *ahim* or *ahum* and *ahin* to have been first reduced to *ahm* and *ahn*, which

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Brockelmann, *Grundriss d. Vergl. Gram. d. semitischen Sprachen*, Berlin, 1907, §§ 104 d δ, 105 e γ, 106 g ε.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Brockelmann, *op. cit.*, loc. cit.

with loss of intervocalic *h* become *am*, *an* or *am*, *an*, and under the influence of the accent *ām*, *ān*, the difficulty vanishes.

In the active participle of stems *tertiæ* ר + suffix of the second person masculine singular, such as for example יצִרְךָ 'thy creator,' the Seghol before the ר is explained as partial assimilation of *i*, which we find in such forms as אִיבֶךָ 'thy enemy,' to the guttural ר. We find the same phenomenon, however, in חֲתָנְךָ 'thy father-in-law' (Ex. 18, 6) and in נָתַנְךָ 'giving thee' (Jer. 20, 4). Both the forms with ר and those with נ are best explained as containing liquid and nasal vowels, viz., *îôçrçā*, *hōthnyçā*, *nōthnyçā*.<sup>1</sup>

In Exodus 33, 3 occurs the unusual form אֶכְלֶךָ 'I will consume thee' which stands for אֶכְלֶךָ, first person imperfect Piel of כָּלָה 'be completed,' with suffix of second person *singular* masculine. In the form in the text we evidently have an *l* vowel. The development from the normal form is to be conceived of as follows; *'akall'çā* > *'akal'çā* > *'akalçā* > *'akiçā*.

From what has been said it will appear that the part played by the liquid and nasal vowels in the Semitic languages is not entirely without significance. In the parent speech, it is true, they are apparently all but non-existent, but in some of its descendants, especially in Aramaic and Hebrew we find them developed in a number of cases. These cases serve to show that while these vowels in Semitic cannot compare in importance to the corresponding sounds in the Indo-European family, the possibility of their occurrence should be borne in mind in any study of exceptional forms.

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<sup>1</sup> This form of the active participle is rare, the cases given being all those that occur with stems *tertiæ* ר or נ; no forms occur from stems *tertiæ* מ: from stems *tertiæ* ל we have only נִצִּילְךָ "thy redeemer," where *l* has become *al* under the influence of the guttural א; in the forms רִכְלֶתְךָ "thy trader" (Ez. 27, 20; 23) and תֹּאכֶלְכֶם "it shall devour you" (Is. 33, 11) in which the conditions are similar to the above, the *a* may be explained as due to the influence of the א which acts as a guttural; in תֹּאכֶלְכֶם it may be simply analogy with the other forms of the imperfect.